

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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FULL TEXT

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY: Last Sunday, Senator Edward Kennedy proposed in the New York Times that President Nixon, having, after all, gone to China and reestablished informal relations there, there is no purpose left to be served in continuing to ostracize Cuba. Mr. Kennedy's point struck many people as logically compelling as we see the ongoing collapse of commitments and alliances annealed by the spirit of resistance to communism a generation ago. Among greater and lesser casualties of that dissolution is the Central Intelligence Agency, whose organizing bias, if you will, was the postwar decision to let communism move no further.

To discuss these points we have two guests. Mr. Mario Lazo became an American citizen only a few days ago, though he has lived half his life here, the other half in Cuba. He was among the two or three best known lawyers in Havana, the founder of a huge firm well-known among other things for its philanthropic activities. He left Cuba after the Bay of Pigs and published a year or so ago a definitive account of the failure of the move to liberate Cuba, "Dagger In The Heart."

Howard Hunt was intimately involved as an official in the CIA in the Bay of Pigs. Indeed, the New York Times named him as the principal CIA official directly involved in that venture. He is a graduate of Brown University, who was a war correspondent for Life magazine, a freelance writer who has published forty-two books, most of them spy novels. On retirement from the CIA after twenty years of duty, he did freelance work as a White House consultant and last June was arrested in connection with the Watergate case. Last Monday he pleaded guilty before federal court and the sentencing is yet to come. The presiding judge and Mr. Hunt's own lawyer have forbidden him to speak about Watergate. But his involvement there has not,

HS/HC- 858

presumably, diminished his knowledge of the CIA and Cuba and his special qualifications, born of long experience, to discuss the CIA and foreign policy.

The lawyers from Washington have only just now advised us that we may not submit to questioning as usual by the panel, to whom I apologize.

I should like to begin by asking Mr. Hunt whether his public identification as a long-time CIA official confers upon him now the right, if only in self-defense, to describe with appropriate discretion some of the activities of the CIA, particularly as they relate to Cuba.

E. HOWARD HUNT: I believe that it does, Mr. Buckley. After all, it was not I who identified myself as a former employee, officer, or official of the Central Intelligence Agency. That information came from the government itself. And I considered it then, and I consider it now, a unilateral abrogation by the government of the commitment that we entered into upon my retirement from the Central Intelligence Agency.

BUCKLEY: Your point is that -- that when you were arrested somebody in the government...

HUNT: May I interject? I was never arrested.

BUCKLEY: When you were what? Detained? Or...

HUNT: I was -- I surrendered to U.S. authorities at the appropriate time.

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh.

HUNT: But I was never at any time arrested.

BUCKLEY: Well, was there -- had that -- was there at that point a warrant for your arrest?

HUNT: No warrant was ever issued for it.

BUCKLEY: No. Uh-huh.

HUNT: I was never a fugitive.

BUCKLEY: Yes. But -- but -- at that -- at that point, as I understand it, the fact of your having been associated with CIA was for the first time publicly ventilated?

HUNT: That is correct, yes.

BUCKLEY: Yes. Now, does -- does this mean that you -- you can speak about yourself as having been a member of the CIA with moral impunity, or does it mean that you can go further in that -- than that and describe some of the activities of CIA in Cuba and some of the forecasts for CIA in the current mood of detente?

HUNT: I feel that I'm able to do that, yes.

BUCKLEY: Okay. Well, then let me ask you a direct question. The CIA is not permitted, as I understand it, to engage in domestic activity. Right?

HUNT: Right.

BUCKLEY: Now, does that mean that nobody has any right to suspect that -- that the Watergate business was a CIA operation?

HUNT: No. That -- perhaps I shouldn't have answered your earlier question as definitively as I did. It is known, for example, that the CIA at one time was involved in domestic operations. And I cite the discovery, the disclosure, of...

BUCKLEY: The NSA business?

HUNT: ...CIA support of the National Student Association. That was a domestic operation.

BUCKLEY: But for purposes of foreign travel, wasn't it?

HUNT: Not solely, no. They recruited American students on U.S. campuses for work in this country which led eventually to work abroad.

BUCKLEY: Well, what -- what about the suspicion, that has been widely ventilated, that experience, especially lifelong experience, with the CIA teaches a person to forget about the legal impediments that lie between him and the accomplishment of a mission that he seeks to -- to achieve? In -- in the grownup world, as I understand it, everybody recognizes that it is illegal for a CIA operative to -- to -- to work in Cuba and it's illegal for a Cuban operative to work in the United

States but they both do it.

HUNT: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Now, under the circumstances, I guess the question I'm asking is, if one spends twenty years working for the CIA, is it likely that on returning to one's own country one has so much absorbed the ethos of the CIA that one tends to go after what it is that one wants and to consider local legislation that stands in the way as sort of irrelevant?

HUNT: If one even were to consider local legislation. It would not be illegal under United States law, for example, for CIA to mount an entry operation in Ottawa or -- or Fort Erie, Canada, the other side of the Peace Bridge. But here we have a geographical distinction. We would not be guilty under United States law of -- of, let's say, a second-degree burglary charge by the United States for an operation that we conducted in Canada, or in Mexico; we would be were it conducted in Florida or Texas or Southern California.

BUCKLEY: Well, I -- I wish to...

HUNT: Am I answering...

BUCKLEY: Yes, you are. And I wish to be very explicit about it. I want to abide by the -- the ground rules and not -- not try to -- any sneak punches. But I guess what I'm -- what I'm asking is, is -- is it fair to say, without violating our understanding, that in approaching the Watergate business you and your associates approached it in the spirit of a CIA operation?

HUNT: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Now, Mr. Lazo, may I -- may I ask you this: at -- at what point did you understand the CIA to be engaged in an operation the objective of which was the deposition of Castro?

MARIO LAZO: At what point did I...

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: ...understand the CIA to be...

BUCKLEY: Historically at what point, yes.

LAZO: ...engaged in what?

BUCKLEY: In an operation the objective of which was the deposition of Castro?

LAZO: Well, I would say that goes back to the Bay of Pigs.

BUCKLEY: Surely not -- not before then? You didn't know the CIA wanted to oust Castro until the Bay of Pigs, until the Marines landed?

LAZO: No, I think that was the first time that I remember. You had something else in mind? If you ask me, I'll be glad to answer you.

BUCKLEY: Well, you -- you -- you were living in Havana as a Cuban citizen.

LAZO: That's right.

BUCKLEY: And you were -- as I understand it, you were helping out agents of a foreign country, including indirectly Mr. Hunt, who were pursuing the orders of the President of the United States. I'm asking you did you know what those orders were.

LAZO: Well, Mr. Buckley, look -- we worked, my partner and I worked, for many years with the CIA and the FBI. Anything we could do to help them we -- we did.

BUCKLEY: Was this in violation of Cuban law?

LAZO: No. No, this...

BUCKLEY: It's okay to work with a foreign...

LAZO: And, furthermore, the -- at that time there was no country that was closer to the United States than Cuba.

BUCKLEY: But I'm talking about post-Castro, I'm not -- I'm not talking about during pre-Castro. Were you working with the CIA or the FBI after Castro came to power? If -- if you don't want to answer, just say so. But -- if -- if you say that you don't want to answer, I understand. But...

LAZO: No, no. I'm -- I want to answer. But I'm -- the -- I never worked professionally with either one. I worked in -- we helped them in every way we could. After Castro came

to power -- as a matter of fact, a year after Castro came to power, in January, 1960, when the American embassy went down, I became a self-appointed spy for the U.S.

BUCKLEY: That -- that surely was illegal, wasn't it?

LAZO: Sure it was illegal then. And by that time we knew where the country was heading; Castro had shown his colors. And what I did was to arrange with a friendly European government to send reports once a week to the FBI in this country.

BUCKLEY: Concerning what?

LAZO: Hmm?

BUCKLEY: Reports concerning what?

LAZO: Reports of everything that was happening in Cuba that the United States should know. For instance, we represented the railroads of Cuba and we had about thirty-five inspectors out and they were reporting from all over the country, and the headquarters, the main office, of the railroads was right under our office, and they would give us reports all the time and we would pass them to the American embassy. My sympathies have always been with the United States.

Now, as I was saying, when the embassy went down and it seemed to me that the United States didn't have very good sources of information anymore, then I would send reports once a week by a courier, who would go from Havana to New York to the capital of this country in Europe and he would drop off my reports; that was to the FBI. Nobody asked me to do that. Nobody ever thanked me for it. Nobody ever paid me for it. I didn't expect any thanks.

BUCKLEY: You -- you were really a volunteer collecting...

LAZO: Yes, surely.

BUCKLEY: ...information. All right. All right, now, going back to Washington, I'd like to ask this of Mr. Hunt. It is often referred to, the Bay of Pigs, as -- as the greatest fiasco in postwar American history. And -- and -- and reference to it is usually used to inspire some sort of a -- a disdain for CIA. Now, I'd like to ask you a two-part question. Number one, was it a failure of intelligence by CIA that resulted in

the fiasco? And number two, if it was more than that, if it was a political failure in Washington, is it a responsibility of CIA to make recommendations with reference to their anticipation of the fortitude in Washington?

HUNT: Let me answer as follows. And I want to answer as completely and responsively as I can. First, the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs...

BUCKLEY: A little louder, please.

HUNT: The fiasco of the Bay of Pigs was not a failure of intelligence. It was not a failure of intelligence collection or of positive intelligence operations. The failure of the Bay of Pigs came about because at a critical time commitments that had been made by high officials of the United States government to the Cubans who were fighting, to their leadership in Miami and elsewhere, those officials backed away from those commitments and, in effect, abandoned the brigade at the beachhead. That was a political decision.

CIA never had any reason to believe that these commitments would be abandoned. We had, after all, been recruiting the Cubans, sending them to training camps in Guatamala for many, many months. And these were the ground rules. First of all, there was the United States fleet offshore. The Boxer was the flagship. Secondly, the -- the principal things that the -- thing that the Cubans were interested in was that they not be opposed at the beachhead by Castro airpower. And this was a definite commitment that was made. Now, this commitment was made by the Eisenhower administration, in which now President Nixon served as Vice President. And I believe he chaired the National Security Council in that capacity. So, in effect, the commitment that was made to the Cubans, who went forward and risked their lives, was nullified by a subsequent political decision of the New Frontier.

BUCKLEY: Well, was there anything to lead you to believe, between the inauguration of President Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs, that he had second thoughts about it?

HUNT: There was this. First of all, during the campaign President Kennedy campaigned -- then Senator Kennedy campaigned on a promise of help to the Cuban exiles. Pres -- Vice President Nixon, who was intimately involved with the operational planning from his position in the National Security Council, could not rebut or refute the Kennedy argument because his lips were sealed. He knew what in...

BUCKLEY: Which Kennedy argument?

HUNT: ...fact we were doing.

BUCKLEY: Which Kennedy...

HUNT: The Ken -- the Kennedy argument that the United States should do something to help overthrow Castro.

BUCKLEY: Why would he want to refute it? Oh, you mean he couldn't say, "Yes, indeed I agree with him. And in fact we intend to..."

HUNT: "And in fact we are so doing," yes.

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh.

HUNT: Evidently the political decision was made to say nothing about it. So this was a plus factor in the Kennedy-Nixon debates, a plus factor for Kennedy.

BUCKLEY: Did -- did...

HUNT: Kennedy actually knew, of course, what we were doing.

BUCKLEY: But he could appear to be more hawkish than Nixon.

HUNT: Yes. That's right. And Kennedy knew perfectly well what we were doing, because he was receiving, as the Democratic candidate, daily briefings from CIA. And he was taking advantage of that knowledge.

BUCKLEY: Not daily briefings from Drew Pearson?

HUNT: [Laughs] Quite conceivably...

BUCKLEY: Yes.

HUNT: ...too. Again, to answer perhaps more specifically to your question, shortly after the election and it was made known that Kennedy had -- had been elected, we were ordered to close down all recruiting and training activities for time -- for the time being. Everything was put into suspense. During this period, Allen Dulles, Dick Bissell, some of the other principal officers of CIA went down to the Kennedy Palm Beach compound

and told him exactly what the situation was. In due course, after about two or three weeks, the commitment was made: go ahead, continue as before.

BUCKLEY: [Unintelligible under Hunt's remark]?

HUNT: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Well...

HUNT: To us that was perfectly understandable, that an incoming President would want to review what his predecessors had done.

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh.

HUNT: There was no intimation from them, and certainly no inference on our -- on our part, that there would be a drawing away from the overall commitment, which was to overthrow Castro and regain Cuba for the free world.

BUCKLEY: Right. Now, the -- Senator Kennedy has said...

HUNT: Senator Edward Kennedy?

BUCKLEY: Yes. I'm sorry. Edward Kennedy has said apropos of the situation that only -- only an armed invasion would have persuaded -- or, would have succeeded in causing Castro to be overthrown. Now, I take it everybody agrees that that was the case when Castro first took power. He -- he -- he was very popular at that point. To what extent was the intelligence reckoning about -- on the Bay of Pigs dependent on a view of a transformed attitude towards Castro by the Cuban people? Did you proceed -- and I'd like for Mr. Lazo also to comment on this -- did you proceed on the assumption that people whose mission it was to overthrow Castro would be universally welcomed?

HUNT: Not universally, no. But certainly by a majority of the Cuban people. This is not to say that we viewed the -- the Cuban citizenry under Castro as a military asset to ourselves. We viewed them as probably being responsive to early indications of victory and of overwhelming force that we intended to show. Again, I should bring out that our -- that the New Frontier did dilute our original plans. It was to be -- instead of an armed airborne envelopment of the -- of the central city in Cuba, this was minimized, apparently by Dean Rusk.

10

I bring out a number of these points in a forthcoming book which I've written on the subject called "Give Us This Day"; and it's subtitled "CIA and the Bay of Pigs Invasion."

BUCKLEY: And it detail -- it details these changes in...

HUNT: It details these changes, yes.

BUCKLEY: In planning. Uh-huh.

HUNT: That's correct.

BUCKLEY: Well, Mr. Lazo, what -- what is your comment, then, about the attitude of the Cuban people in April of 1962 -- '61?

LAZO: I hope that you won't think that this is a digression, but may I go back a little bit...

BUCKLEY: Sure. Sure.

LAZO: ...and tell you about my -- how I met Bernard Barker, who is one of the group -- the Watergate group...

BUCKLEY: Sure.

LAZO: ...and who was very active in the Bay of Pigs?

BUCKLEY: Sure.

LAZO: May I -- may I do that?

BUCKLEY: Of course.

LAZO: It has a bearing on this. Barker was brought to my office shortly after World War II by the military attache of the American embassy, a fellow named Colonel Buzz Grant. His problem was that he had done security work to protect Mrs. Truman and Margaret Truman on a visit they had made to Cuba...

BUCKLEY: As -- as a Cuban citizen, Barker?

LAZO: He was an American citizen.

BUCKLEY: American citizen.

LAZO: But the Cuban -- the Cubans -- he spoke perfect

11

Spanish; he was born in Cuba, I believe. And the Cubans asked him if he would head a group to give the security to the -- Mrs. Truman and Margaret Truman. He was glad to do that. That's not done in the way that you would normally think. For instance, they didn't -- he didn't -- they don't follow 'em around in a patrol car or anything like that. The way they do that is that they assign Cuban secret servicemen to the various dives and places in Havana, which was a city of a million people, where the underworld gathered.

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh.

LAZO: These people are disguised. Sometimes they feign intoxication, although the Cubans don't drink very much. And they keep their eyes open and their ears open, and if they see anything suspicious or hear anything, they follow 'em and they do plenty of bugging of telephones. And that goes on for -- for a week or ten days.

Barker was the head of this Cuban group, you see. But in taking this job he had signed a police form which was handed to him, and it turned out that this police form contained a -- an oath of allegiance to Cuba. And somebody heard about that, some kid in the embassy heard about it and reported it to Washington, and then they took away his citizenship. And Colonel Grant, when he brought Barker to me, said, "Mario," he said, "this fellow has had a wonderful war record, was a captain in the American Air Force. He was the first fellow to volunteer from Cuba. He had something like twelve missions over Germany. He was shot down. He was in prison there. And I wish you'd help him. Everybody admires him." So of course I did help him. And that was arranged.

Now, the second thing that happened was a little more dramatic. This was in early 1960 after Castro had been in power about a year. Barker came to me one time, distraught and nervous, and his problem then was that he had had hiding in his house one of his closest friends who had been doing counterrevolutionary work and had been there a couple of weeks and finally had decided to make a move and got caught. And under the pressure of torture he'd confessed where he was. And Barker had wisely arranged to call his wife every two hours from a pay station in Havana to a grocery store near their house in the suburbs. He had a daughter, a little girl by the name of Maria Elena, Helen, she was about ten years old. And they had one faithful servant. And he thought I could get him out because we represented a couple of the American airlines. He's a very intelligent fellow.

But he was, as I say, distraught; he wasn't thinking very straight. Of course to harbor a so-called "criminal" was a capital offense, too. So Barker was in danger of being killed.

So I told him exactly what you would have told him. I said, "Bernard, what you do now is you call up your wife and you tell her not to admit under any circumstances that this fellow has been in your house in the last six months. He knows what your house looks like, 'cause he's been there; but he hasn't been there for six months. And tell that little girl of yours to say the same thing and your servant to say the same thing, and never deviate from that. And I'll do what I can to get this boy to change his story before he dies."

So in those days they permitted one member of the family to see somebody who was about to be executed. In this case, it was this boy's sister. A very attractive girl, about -- Cuban girl, about twenty-five, typical Cuban girl with -- with pale, pallid white skin, ebony black hair, flashing eyes, long eyelashes, high spirited girl. And I went to see her and I said, "Will you help my friend?" And she said, "Of course. Your friend did everything he could to save my brother. Now we have to try to save him." And I arranged for a launch to go across the bay to Cabanios [?] Fortress to see the execution. And as the priest was moving away and the squad was getting ready to fire, this fellow began screaming, in Spanish of course: he said, "One more thing. I want to say that I haven't been in Bernard Barker's house in six months." And he kept on repeating that until they shot him. But he was a very nice-looking fellow and they didn't want to shoot him. As a matter of fact, only one bullet hit him. And he slumped down. Two men went up and lifted him and strapped him up on the post. And then the man in charge of the squad told them that if they didn't shoot him they would be courtmartialed, and they shot him; they killed him.

And two days later we sprung Bernard Barker. Then he came to my office and he said, "I want you to tell me what I can do to help bring down the monster who murdered my best friend." And I took him over to the American embassy and introduced him to the CIA agent there. And that's the way he started working for the CIA.

BUCKLEY: But let me ask you this, then...

LAZO: Yes.

BUCKLEY: ...Mr. Lazo. Aren't -- aren't you using

13

a terminology that is justified by -- by a rather dangerous use of the law?

LAZO: By what?

BUCKLEY: By a rather dangerous use of the law. I thoroughly sympathize with your and Barker's, let alone the dead man's, ambition to remove Castro. But I don't understand, really, that we -- that we can persuasively challenge the right of a country, however tyrannical its leader, to attempt to kill counterrevolutionaries. It's -- if -- if -- if the ambition of -- of -- of Barker, or of Hunt, let's say, working in Cuba, is to overthrow Castro, I should think if Castro finds out about it he's got a right to shoot you. Now, that isn't murder. You as a lawyer would know that. It's not murder.

LAZO: Just a second. Just a second. I'm surprised that a man of your intelligence should be talking the way you're talking. Fidel Castro has killed -- murdered -- twenty-five thousand boys and men whose only crime was that they clung to their democratic ideals; they were against communism.

BUCKLEY: No, I -- I'm on your side, and I hope they win; but I say if they get caught at it, they're going to be executed, and this isn't...

LAZO: That's right.

BUCKLEY: ...this isn't murder under any law I know about.

LAZO: If they get caught at it, they get executed.

BUCKLEY: If -- if King George had caught George Washington, he'd have hung him.

LAZO: Yes.

BUCKLEY: And this -- this -- this would have been something that you and I would have regretted...

LAZO: Sure.

BUCKLEY: ...but it is not something that would have been illegal under any known code.

LAZO: No, I'm not saying...

14

HUNT: May I suggest -- may I suggest...

LAZO: Excuse me just a second. If you'd been living in George Washington's time you would have done everthing possible to help him escape.

HUNT: Isn't the distinction...

BUCKLEY: Sure.

LAZO: Well, that's what I did.

HUNT: May I suggest this? -- that -- that King -- King George was a constitutional monarch, or at least he was a recognized monarch; he overthrew nobody to achieve his position in Great Britain. Castro, on the other hand...

BUCKLEY: In the first place, his ancestors did. In the second place, Castro was recognized at the time we're talking about by every country in the world, including the United States...

HUNT: That's correct.

BUCKLEY: ...as the legitimate leader...

HUNT: However, a large segment of the Cuban population did not recognize him as their leader.

BUCKLEY: No, but that's -- that's their risk. You -- you can always appeal sub specie eternitatis and say, "Sic semper tyrannis" and try to put a bullet hole in the tyrant's heart, and I hope that the aim is sure. But I think that Mr. Lazo is confusing people by using the terminology of "murdered," "so-called 'criminal'" -- he wasn't a so-called "criminal," he was a criminal...

LAZO: They don't consider...

BUCKLEY: ...by Cuban law.

LAZO: ...it murder. The Cubans don't consider it murder.

BUCKLEY: I know. I know.

LAZO: Yes.

15

BUCKLEY: Because...

LAZO: They have one rule of morality: anything that advances the conquest of the world by the communist empire is good. You can lie, you can steal, you can kill. Killing is not murder to them; it's a good thing. It's not what we consider murder; I go along with you on that. Anything that hinders them is bad. That's the only...

BUCKLEY: I agree with you. But, look, if you -- if you had taken the case of the man who you saw executed to the International Council of Jurists, you could not have made a case that they would have heard...

LAZO: No.

BUCKLEY: ...because if -- if in fact he was engaged, and you have volunteered the information that he was -- engaged in counterrevolutionary activity and the crime for that was capital and he received a capital sentence, that -- that's...

LAZO: I'm not talking about legal technology -- tech -- details. I'm talking about the fact that Castro has murdered, in my opinion, twenty-five thousand men and boys whose only crime was that they clung to their democratic ideals -- taught by the United States, don't forget that. And if you had a -- a Castro in charge -- the head -- chief of state of this country, relatively and in proportion to population he would have killed five hundred and sixty-five thousand Americans. And that's just the killing. Now, how 'bout the people in prison, the political prisoners?

BUCKLEY: Yes, if you -- look, let's not waste any time in your trying to persuade me that Castro is an evil man, because I agree with you. I think he's probably as thorough a tyrant as the twentieth century has -- has produced, as -- as thorough in his own scale. But we're talking about something else. We're talking about the United States, its intelligence arm, the risks it takes, the bearing of an experience in that kind of affair on domestic life. And it may very well be that somebody like Barker -- it's easier to talk about Barker than about Howard Hunt because we're talking about somebody who isn't here -- it may be that Barker is totally seized, as the result of his experience in Cuba...

LAZO: Totally what?

BUCKLEY: Totally seized -- with a single objective.

And that single objective is to do what he can for liberty as he understands it.

LAZO: And for the United States...

BUCKLEY: Right.

LAZO: And against the communists, yes.

BUCKLEY: Right. Yes, but in -- but in the course of applying that kind of license to activities he tripped against an American law and as a result of that has pleaded guilty. Now, what is your attitude towards Barker...

LAZO: Well, let's say -- you're coming to -- to Watergate now, right? You want me to speak about the...

BUCKLEY: Well, can he and I speak about Watergate without violating our code?

HUNT: I would think so. But may I just go back...

BUCKLEY: Sure.

HUNT: ...a step before you do that?

BUCKLEY: Sure.

HUNT: You had asked me about the failure of intelligence and whether or not CIA had expected a popular uprising, in effect.

BUCKLEY: Yes.

HUNT: Or whether the administration had. I have a list here of four recommendations that I made well before I joined the project, based on my personal assessment of the situation in Cuba. Now, I made this in 1959, and I will list them.

The first recommendation I made was [inaudible due to network technical difficulty] to destroy the Cuban radio and television transmitters before or coincident with the Cuban. The third was to destroy the island's microwave relay system just before the invasion begins. And the fourth: discard any thought of a popular uprising against Castro until the issue has already been militarily decided.

17

BUCKLEY: And your point is -- what? That history bears you out?

HUNT: My point is simply that we did not at any time expect a popular uprising. We expected acceptance of our troops.

BUCKLEY: Well, this was 1959. Castro was still popular, wasn't he?

HUNT: He was still popular, yes.

BUCKLEY: But he was dramatically less popular in '61.

HUNT: In '61, yes.

LAZO: May I speak about...

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: ...the Watergate and Bernard Barker, and my Miami friends and -- to understand Watergate, you've got to understand, in the first place, the Bay of Pigs. We've been talking about that. And you've got to understand the conditions in Cuba at the time of the election here in order to understand why these people went into the -- went into Watergate. And I want to just -- let me go back to the Bay of Pigs just for a second.

The Bay of Pigs was a struggle that took place in Washington, not in Cuba. It was a struggle between the liberal presidential advisers on the one hand and the conservative CIA and the Pentagon on the other. In between these two groups was the new President, who had never been accused of lacking either intelligence or courage, but he sided with his liberal advisers. And the key point in this invasion was the destruction of Castro's tiny air force on the ground before the invaders hit the beaches. This was to be done by three air strikes of sixteen planes each coming from Nicaragua to the south coast of Cuba. Forty-eight sorties minimum. They knew where Castro's planes were. These were being watched by American reconnaissance, by the U-2.

What happened was this. The first strike of sixteen planes was cut in half by orders from the White House. The second strike was cancelled entirely. The third strike, after

it was too late to call off the invasion, was cancelled entirely. So that instead of having forty-eight sorties minimum, you had eight. And they destroyed almost all of Castro's air force on the ground, but Castro was left with three jets, two Sea Furies, and they commanded the skies. The Cuban freedom fighters were flying from Nicaragua three and half hours to the beachhead and they had twenty minutes or thirty minutes over the target and then three and a half hours back. I thought of that yesterday when I flew from Hartford here. Seven hours to be over the target for thirty minutes at the most. And Castro's jets, which were fueling nearby, flew in -- two -- two at the same time and -- and -- and slaughtered them.

BUCKLEY: What does this have to do with Barker?

LAZO: It has a great deal to do with Barker, because Barker was one of the high-level men in the invasion, and he saw this thing happen by orders, decisions for disaster, taken in Washington, and he was -- I don't know what the word is -- absolutely humiliated by what happened. He can never forget this. Barker is a great patriot from the point of view of the United States, but he loves Cuba too. And he saw that Cuba had been betrayed; I use the word deliberately. The Cuban brigade on the beach was betrayed. They had been told that they would have continuing supplies to the beach. They never got any supplies. The Castro jets sank two of the five ships. They -- they destroyed half of the Cuban planes, the free...

BUCKLEY: But what -- what -- we're not here to talk about the Bay of Pigs, really, except insofar as it bears on current proceedings. After all, we can talk about Waterloo or we can...

LAZO: All right.

BUCKLEY: ...talk about Gettysburg...

LAZO: May I -- may I just say...

BUCKLEY: ...and dissect the military and the state.

LAZO: Yes. All right. But...

BUCKLEY: But go on and tell me what all this has to do -- let's simply accept that the military handling of the Bay of Pigs was catastrophic; everybody knows that. Now, what

does this...

HUNT: Military?

BUCKLEY: ...have to do with Barker?

HUNT: Political handling.

BUCKLEY: Military and political, right. Yes. They often go hand in hand. Now, what does it have to do with -- with Barker, since we've been licensed to discuss...

LAZO: Yes. I'll tell you what it has...

BUCKLEY: ...his relationship to Watergate?

LAZO: Here's what it has to do with Barker. But let's -- let's come now to November of last year, at the time of the election. Now we know about the Bay of Pigs and we know how Barker felt about that. We also have to know something about conditions in Cuba last November. You don't know much about that, because the attention of the Americans was -- is focussed on Southeast Asia. Cuba's not in the news. But Castro is now facing the greatest crisis that he's ever faced. And everything's going against him. His regime is coming to an end.

To understand this you must remember that when he came to power the Cubans were among the better-fed people of the world. That's not Lazo speaking; that's the Department of Agriculture in Washington. And today everything is rationed -- butter, bread, sugar, tobacco, everything is rationed except "Hate America" propaganda, "Hate Nixon" propaganda; that's the only thing that's not rationed. Every hour of the day the controlled radio pours out hatred for the United States.

Now, Castro knows -- I must mention the sugar crop. Two or three years ago he promised the Cubans a ten million dollar -- a ten million ton crop. Actually, the crop last year was four million, which is what Cuba made fifty years ago, and four million in spite of the fact that he used the entire country to -- to harvest it. We used to harvest...

BUCKLEY: He confessed his failure. As a matter of fact, he offered to resign. From time to time, he does. You remember, a summer of so ago? I mean he confessed his own failure.

20

So go ahead. We know about the failure of Castroism...

LAZO: Yes.

BUCKLEY: But go ahead now and relate that, please, to American policy.

LAZO: Yes. Well, the point is that this year he'll probably make about three and a half million tons. And that's their money crop. That's the way they get their money to import things.

So Castro knows that his only hope is to be recognized by the United States.

BUCKLEY: Why?

LAZO: And...

BUCKLEY: Because we would give foreign aid, you mean?

LAZO: No. Because the United States would then supply all the spare parts, the equipment and everything else that the Soviet bloc has been unable to supply.

BUCKLEY: Why has the Soviet bloc been unable to supply it? Can't they get it from us?

LAZO: For one reason, it's too far away. They get their petroleum from the Black Sea.

BUCKLEY: Why is that too far?

LAZO: Hmm?

BUCKLEY: Why is that too far? You just go on a couple days extra on a steamer.

LAZO: You mean why is the Black Sea too far?

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: Well, it's pretty far compared to Venezuela.

BUCKLEY: I mean if the Soviet Union desires to supply Cuba, it can.

21

LAZO: Well, it's not doing it very well.

BUCKLEY: Well, then it decided it doesn't want to. It's a political point, right?

[Confusion of voices.]

LAZO: The Soviets don't do anything very well. And they're not doing this very well.

BUCKLEY: They manage their propaganda pretty effectively.

LAZO: Except the propaganda. They do that very well.

However, here is Castro in November, 1972, knowing that he's through, that he has to die. And his one chance of surviving is to get recognition and help from the United States. He can't get that from the Republicans. His one chance was to get it from the Democrats, from McGovern, Ted Kennedy, Fulbright, all these fellows that are in favor of doing business with Castro.

BUCKLEY: Why couldn't he count on Nixon? After all, who would have thought that the Red Chinese could count on Nixon?

LAZO: Why couldn't he count on Nixon?

BUCKLEY: Sure. If Nixon turned around and recognized Cuba tomorrow, it would hardly begin to occupy as much acreage of the front page as what he did to China last year, which made him a hero.

LAZO: Mr. Buckley, let me say that I may disagree with you on one thing. I consider Nixon to be a genuine anti-communist. And the fact that he has travelled to Moscow and Peking has simply nothing to do with Cuba.

BUCKLEY: Why shouldn't he travel to Havana?

LAZO: Hmm?

BUCKLEY: Why shouldn't he travel to Havana?

LAZO: This is a different thing entirely.

BUCKLEY: Why?

LAZO: Because these are -- because the other countries are great countries. Russia has your population. The Soviets

22

have a quarter [sic]...

BUCKLEY: Our population.

LAZO: Well, the size -- two hundred million...

BUCKLEY: Now that you're an American citizen.

LAZO: And the Chinese have a quarter of the population of the world.

BUCKLEY: In other words, he's afraid of Russia, and, therefore, he has to be courteous and gallant towards it...

LAZO: That's true...

BUCKLEY: But Cuba's a small country, so we can bully it.

LAZO: ...and that's right. Cuba's a small enough dictator, who is a tiny little country of eight million people, the size of the state of Pennsylvania. There's no reason to think of treating Castro the way you would the rulers of Russia and China. I don't go along with that.

BUCKLEY: Excuse me.

LAZO: It's all right.

BUCKLEY: So you can enter into this, Mr. Hunt, since we're not talking about Watergate. Is it your point that because Cuba -- and how would this sound inside the inner councils of CIA -- that because Cuba is vulnerable to American pressure in a sense that the Soviet Union is not, therefore it makes sense to take a hard line with Cuba even while we're taking a soft line towards the Soviet Union?

HUNT: Yes, that makes sense to me. Castro Cuba, of course, is a client state of the Soviet Union. And I think it's a matter of record among people who study Latin American affairs that Castro has been a somewhat less than satisfactory client of the Soviet Union...

BUCKLEY: Insufficient servility?

HUNT: Insufficient servility. Following the Cuban missile crisis there were a great many problems. He felt himself

in a sense abandoned by the loss of his Russian military advisers. The Soviet Union itself, of course, is undergoing a time of tremendous economic stress. The mere fact that they signed a wheat and corn deal with the United States would indicate that they are having trouble not only fulfilling their internal needs, but this means less for their client states, such as the Arab world, Egypt in particular -- the United Arab Republic -- and Cuba. Cuba is very small potatoes as far as the Kremlin is concerned...

LAZO: Of course it is.

HUNT: The death of Che Guevara in effect put an end to the type of guerrilla activity that Castro had been promising and promulgating throughout the hemisphere.

BUCKLEY: But now wait a minute. Isn't this different from what both of you have been really maintaining over the years? You wrote a book called "Dagger at the Heart"...

LAZO: That's right.

BUCKLEY: Well, how can a country be small potatoes that is a dagger aimed at our heart? If, in fact, the ambition of the Soviet Union is to rule the world, as both of us think it to be, how can you say that they consider Cuba to be small potatoes?

LAZO: I'll tell you how, because Cuba is an unsinkable aircraft carrier positioned ninety miles from your shores...

BUCKLEY: Well, they're not small potatoes then.

LAZO: Not in that respect. Small potatoes as far as getting rid of the sawed off dictator, of course. He doesn't mean that. Cuba is a dagger pointed at the heart. It's...

BUCKLEY: Well, then, why wouldn't the Soviet Union be prepared to make maximum sacrifices, as indeed it has done? I've seen the estimate of a million dollars per day. Is that unreasonable?

HUNT: Not unreasonable, no.

BUCKLEY: Okay. A million dollars a day is not something that you afford as a subsidy for a small potato client state.

24

LAZO: Well, there...

BUCKLEY: If it were situated in mid Africa, or something like that, they probably wouldn't pay a million dollars; they wouldn't be worth it. But situated where they are now, it is an important lesion in the Caribbean basin, isn't it?

HUNT: It's quiescent. It's quiescent at the time. On the other hand, we have no reason to believe that there are not Soviet military emplacements in Cuba in a state of readiness. We don't know. There have been no American or international observers who have ever gone there.

BUCKLEY: Why doesn't the CIA know?

HUNT: I would say because of post Bay of Pigs restrictions on the degree, the parameters of intelligence activity directed at the island republic.

BUCKLEY: In other words, an American citizen is not entitled to rest confident that the CIA knows whether there are, or there are not, massive Soviet offensive weapons buried in Cuba?

HUNT: No, he's not.

LAZO: What was your answer to that?

HUNT: No, he is not.

BUCKLEY: Now, is that -- are you making a technical aspersion on CIA?

HUNT: No, I am simply saying that as in any government agency, funds are allocated for certain areas of activity. Obviously Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the entire southeast Asian picture has monopolized most of the American military and intelligence budget for a number of years.

BUCKLEY: All the people who could predict things were in South Vietnam last year?

HUNT: And the men and the resources available for focusing on Latin American problems accordingly were reduced. CIA hasn't been hiring very much in recent years. It's been cut back. They have had to absorb within their own ranks budget

25

deficiencies. Whenever a new line of activity, support activity, develops in another part of the world -- and again I go back to Southeast Asia -- the funds have to come from somewhere. They come, generally speaking, from Latin American activities. Certainly U-2 overflights of the island republic have been cut back. They were, in any case, after the Bay of Pigs turned over to the Air Force. The U-2, which CIA developed and utilized so successfully for so many years, was taken out of the agency's hands and put in the hands of the Air Force.

There has been a tendency I think within the entire government to do nothing, or if anything is done at all it is to provide the appearance rather than the substantive action. And accordingly, I answer your initial question in that sense, Bill.

BUCKLEY: So that it isn't that it couldn't be done...

HUNT: Right.

BUCKLEY: It's that we haven't given it that kind of priority.

HUNT: We may not, to my knowledge. And, after all, I retired two years ago, two and a half years ago, from CIA.

At that time, I myself was not confident that there were not missiles or other offensive weapons in Cuba, placed there by the Soviet Union.

BUCKLEY: Well, is it -- when Senator Kennedy says, "Look, let's, for God sakes, go ahead and recognize Cuba, having first engineered the consent of the Organization of American States, on the grounds that not to do so, given our current attitude towards China and the Soviet Union, is anomalous." I understand you to be saying, don't give in to Kennedy's advice because Cuba is having very, very serious difficulties, and if we continue to let natural pressures work against Cuba, it might result in the overthrowing of a despotic government.

LAZO: Not only "might result," it would certainly result, without any question.

BUCKLEY: By when? By when?

LAZO: By when?

BUCKLEY: Uh-huh.

26

LAZO: Well, that's a guess, of course, but very soon, in my opinion. I think he's very close to the end. The people are ready to take to the streets. All they need is some kind of a little sign from the United States that we'd like to see them do it, some voice on the Voice of America, or something of that kind.

But Mr. Buckley, let me -- let me go back just a second to Watergate. May I do that?

BUCKLEY: Sure.

LAZO: And mention my friend, Barker?

BUCKLEY: Sure.

LAZO: I've told you about the Bay of Pigs...

BUCKLEY: You have, yes.

LAZO: ...and I told you how humiliated Barker felt about that, having worked at it and having been blamed for it, being part of the organization. I've told you about conditions in Cuba. Then we come to the election. And there were reports before the election. We got many reports that money was coming from Cuba into the McGovern campaign fund....

BUCKLEY: You had reports from whom?

LAZO: From where?

BUCKLEY: From whom? Yes.

LAZO: From Cuba. Communist money.

BUCKLEY: From what people in Cuba? You mean from friends of yours or what?

LAZO: Well, I have many sources...

BUCKLEY: Of information.

LAZO: Many sources. We didn't have proof, of course. We just had these reports. If we had proof, it wouldn't have had to be investigated. You know that.

So there were these reports. And this group conducted, in my opinion, a patriotic, honorable counter-intelligence operation. I asked a friend of mine in Norfolk where I live the other

day if he knew what counter-intelligence meant. And he said, "No, what is it?" This guy is a Harvard graduate.

BUCKLEY: No wonder, huh?

[Laughter.]

LAZO: Well, I said it's a very risky operation, very secret, and it's designed to uncover men, women and activities working against the United States. And, of course, every country in the world does it.

BUCKLEY: Well, if that's true, then the Watergate people were direct instruments of the government -- if what you say is true. I mean, you don't conduct counter-intelligence operations, sui sponde, do you?

LAZO: Sui what?

BUCKLEY: Sui sponde, of your own decisions.

LAZO: These were very highly trained men. And this question of finding if communist money is coming to the United States is a very difficult thing. They wash the money about six times. You know what that means, don't you?

BUCKLEY: Laundered, yes.

LAZO: They put it through accounts in foreign countries, and so forth. You've got to have very good men to check on that.

They had that report. And that's one thing...

BUCKLEY: If this is embarrassing, you ought to stop it. According to the...

HUNT: It's not embarrassing to me, because it doesn't affect me one way or another. I pleaded guilty to six counts.

LAZO: Now, another reason they had for going in there -- there'd been, as everybody knows, security leaks, classified information. Incidentally, I'm not saying for a second that McGovern was in on this, or O'Brien. Of course not. Nobody thinks that they are -- they consider themselves to be patriots, and I think everybody can agree with that. I'm not saying that.

BUCKLEY: You're saying somebody was in on it, right?

28

LAZO: Hmm?

BUCKLEY: You're saying somebody was in on it. Look, you received reports saying that communist money is going into the Democratic organization...

LAZO: Which had a nine million dollar deficit and which needed the money. Yes.

BUCKLEY: Yes. Right. Right. Now, what you -- now you're saying, however, O'Brien and McGovern didn't know about it. But all of a sudden you are crediting those sources. You're saying, I accept the fact that there was communist money in the Democrat operation, but I'm exonerating the top guys of any knowledge of it.

LAZO: Yes, I am exonerating the top guys.

BUCKLEY: But what makes you accept that allegation?

LAZO: Well, because I think they're above that sort of thing.

BUCKLEY: No, no, no, no, no, no. What makes you accept the allegation that, in fact, there was communist money in the Democratic operation?

LAZO: Because, as I say, Castro's regime is growing to an end. And he knows that the only way he can survive...

BUCKLEY: No, no, no, no. That makes...

LAZO: ...is to have McGovern as President of the United States.

BUCKLEY: ...That makes it plausible. But it does not validate any...

LAZO: It makes it logical.

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: Well, a lawyer deals in logic.

BUCKLEY: Yes, but it's also logical that Nixon shouldn't have gone to China, but he did.

[Laughter.]

Well, anyway, go ahead. This is a hypothesis of yours.

LAZO: A hypothesis? No, it's a conviction from everything I know. And I have, as I say, many sources of information.

So counter-intelligence. Secondly, trying to find out about the security leaks. And then, of course, as you know, there were rumors that there were going to be riots at the Republican convention. They would have liked to have known about that, too.

So there're very good reasons for this. And politics is a dirty business. You know that. The Americans all know that. McGovern in his campaign accused -- he compared Nixon to Hitler on three occasions publicly, the Nixon government to the Hitler henchmen. And that's the communist line. In Cuba today whenever Nixon's name is printed in the government papers, the way they print it is N-I -- the swastika -- O-N. That's the communist line. McGovern was doing that. And this kind of thing is not a parlor game. It's not tiddly-winks. It's...

BUCKLEY: No, but here's what I'm trying to say, Mr. Lazo. Assuming that we accept your hypothesis, then aren't we required to accept that the people who crashed Watergate were doing so at the direction of a responsible official of the United States government?

LAZO: Not necessarily.

BUCKLEY: Why not?

LAZO: Because they could have been doing it with anti-Castro Cuban money. That's possible.

BUCKLEY: But counter-intelligence operations are usually done in behalf of a government, aren't they?

LAZO: I don't know, and you don't know where the money was coming from.

BUCKLEY: You mean it could have been -- according to this hypothesis, it could have been a completely spontaneous thing?

HUNT: That's right.

LAZO: What I'm trying to say is that this is an
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honorable...

BUCKLEY: In the same sense that he spontaneously acted as a spy for CIA in Cuba?

HUNT: That's right. And certainly before the Bay of Pigs, a couple of years before, even the pro-Castro partisans conducted their own counter-intelligence operations against Castro -- against Batista. So you don't need necessarily to link...

BUCKLEY: I thought they were working for the New York Times.

HUNT: ...the phrase counter-intelligence with employment by a government, per se, ipso facto.

BUCKLEY: It could be just spontaneously organized.

HUNT: By people who know what they're doing. Yes.

LAZO: May I say one more thing...

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: ...because I think our time is ending.

BUCKLEY: Yes.

LAZO: I consider that this group are men of honor; they're patriots. I think that instead of being prosecuted they should be decorated.

BUCKLEY: Now wait a minute. You can't decorate somebody for breaking the law, can you?

LAZO: Yes, you can.

BUCKLEY: Well, give me a recent example.

LAZO: Well, I'll give you this example, that when we get our country back, get Cuba back, I can assure you that the first government of a free Cuba will decorate this group. I consider that I'm...

BUCKLEY: No, I can understand that. I can understand

that.

LAZO: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Just as, say, de Gaulle undoubtedly decorated a lot of Frenchmen who shot people, other Frenchmen, who were collaborating with the Nazis. I can understand that. But I don't understand your taking the position that the American Justice Department is acting perversely in prosecuting people who plead guilty to breaking American laws.

LAZO: There are some things which rise beyond -- above that: love of country. Let me put it this way. I feel that I'm in the presence of a great man sitting here, one of the great men of our time. You know, when we left Cuba, my wife and I, we left with two dollars. To lose everything that you've made your entire life, at the end of a long life, is very bad. To lose a friend, the way Barker lost his friend, the way this gentleman recently lost his wife, is much worse. But when you lose honor, you lose everything. And he hasn't lost -- and these men have not lost their honor, as far as we believe. And I can assure you that the six hundred and fifty thousand Cubans in this country have the highest regard for them. Don't you be concerned. We're going to help you in every way we can. And you still have your honor. That's the important thing.

BUCKLEY: Well, but it's only important I think for you, Mr. Lazo, to acknowledge that, paradoxical though it may sound, the pursuit of honor can require temporal punishment.

LAZO: Yes, it can.

BUCKLEY: But you must disparage necessarily the people who mete out that punishment, because, in fact, the two do not contradict each other, philosophically, and certainly not historically.

In any case, the time is up. Thank you very much, Mr. Lazo. Thank you, Mr. Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you.

BUCKLEY: Ladies and gentlemen.